

Summer Newsletter

LPTS launches new Black Church Studies Program.

By Toya Richards Hill

A new program at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary will allow students to more fully understand all aspects of the black church, utilizing the wealth of knowledge available from faculty whose scholarship includes the black church perspective.

The Seminary will launch the Black Church Studies Program in the fall with an inaugural cohort. The program, the first of its kind at a seminary in the region, will offer three tracks of study – a certificate program for students not enrolled in a degree program; a concentration in the Master of Divinity and Master of Arts (Religion) degree programs; and a concentration in the Doctor of Ministry degree program. “This has been a long-term and deep-seated vision that has been present in the Seminary for a number of years,” said the Dr. Dean K. Thompson, Louisville Seminary president. “Louisville Seminary has had an ongoing vision for bringing diverse disciples of Jesus Christ to the table of dialogue, unity, learning, social justice, and work for the common good,” he said.

Central to the program will be the Seminary faculty and staff who will oversee and facilitate things. The Rev. Lewis Brogdon will serve as Director of the program. He will share those duties with ones he already fulfills as Associate Director of Recruitment and Admissions for Louisville Seminary. Pivotal also are those who will become part of the Black Church Studies Program teaching faculty: The Rev. Dr. **Scott C. Williamson**, the Robert H. Walkup Professor of Theological Ethics; The Rev. Dr. **Johnny B. Hill**, Assistant Professor of Theology; The Rev. Dr. **Debra J. Mumford**, the Frank H. Caldwell Assistant Professor of Homiletics; The Rev. Dr. **Elizabeth Johnson Walker**, Associate Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling; The Rev. Dr. **Cláudio Carvalhaes**, Assistant Professor of Worship and Preaching; and The Rev. Dr. **Dianne Reistroffer**, Professor of Ministry, Director of Methodist Studies, and Interim Director of Field Education.

“We are claiming and utilizing the marvelous human resources that we have built up,” Thompson said. “We, by design and intentionality, have built a creative cadre of racial-ethnic scholars and leaders and administrators who have the desire and the means to pull this off.”

Williamson, one of three Louisville Seminary professors who first talked about the program in early 2000, said the hope was that the Seminary be a place where African American students “could not only survive, but thrive,” and that it be an institution where African American faculty also could flourish. “We really wanted to see more diversity, generally,” he said. Additionally, “we did not just want a certificate program in black church studies. We really wanted a program that would be integrated into the curriculum.” Brogdon said among the offerings included in the certificate program, which will span two years, are new courses such as black church studies, black theology, and professional ethics. New courses, which are still in development, also will be offered for the concentration in the Doctor of Ministry degree program.

Classes currently available will make up the concentration in the Master of Divinity and Master of Arts (Religion) degree programs. Williamson said the program will focus on the most current practices. The focal point will be on “what is the cutting edge, where is the need, and how are we meeting those needs.”

“We are training for the 21st century church,” he added. When students come for theological education it’s important “that they be instructed in the language of their tradition,” said Brogdon, who earned his Master of Divinity degree at Louisville Seminary in 2005. “This program gives us ... another opportunity to give students the tools they need for their particular tradition.”

The program also will enable Louisville Seminary to develop a niche in this particular area of theological study, and serve those both inside and outside of Seminary degree programs who are seeking more in-depth knowledge, he said. “It’s a way to network extensively with the more than 200 African American congregations here in the city,” Brogdon said. “There have been multiple congregations who have expressed interest.” As part of his recruiting and admissions responsibilities, Brogdon also has built a relationship with the region’s various historically black colleges and universities, where there might be students

interested in pursuing graduate coursework in Black Church Studies.

People will come out of this program understanding the black church tradition, understanding the challenges that are pressing the African-American community, and having the “tools and strategies and skills to be able to meet some of those challenges,” he said.

Professor Walker, who has spent time in her career in active ministry, said she fully supports the program and understands first-hand the value it holds. As a pastor, “my own knowledge of black studies and the African American tradition was helpful to me in having a sensitivity about worship and the value of worship ... in the African American community,” she said. “Without paying particular attention to the development of African American people in this country since slavery ... it is very difficult to have a sensitivity to the kinds of nuances ... that are present in the black community,” Walker added.

Director attends annual Hampton Minister’s Conference

On June 7-12 Rev. Brogdon attended the 95th Hampton Minister’s conference as a representative of LPTS. The conference theme was “The prophetic role in difficult times” with insightful and inspiring lectures from Dr. Renita Weems and Dr. Brad Braxton and powerful preaching from Dr. Claybon Lea and Dr. H. Beecher Hicks. Valuable time was spent networking with pastors and leaders in various denominations and ministerial capacities.

Director visits congregations in Kentucky and Virginia.

Rev. Brogdon spent time in June and early July visiting congregations and introducing the new program. After attending the Hampton Minister’s Conference, two Baptist congregations were visited respectively on June 13 and 14. One of the professors in the BCS program, Dr. Johnny B. Hill, was invited to preach at St. Stephen Baptist Church for their 83rd church anniversary. Dr. Hill preached on “The Power of the Holy Spirit” from Acts 2 to a packed house with tremendous energy from the youth choir.

The following afternoon, Rev. Brogdon served as the chief examiner at a service of ordination at Cane Run Missionary Baptist Church. The seminary’s

presence at important events and the members of the BCS program leadership in these venues model the benefits of theological education and the institution’s commitment to ecclesial diversity.

June 28, Rev. Brogdon was invited to preach for Rev. Bruce Burns, a recent LPTS MDIV alum and pastor of Keas Tabernacle CME Church in Mt Sterling, KY. A sermon entitled “Love Ain’t Easy” from Hosea 1, encouraged and challenged the church to struggle toward more mature expressions of love in the concrete and hard realities of relationships. More recently, the Spirit of Liberty Worship Center in Roanoke VA was visited on July 5 where Bishop Malverse Simpson serves as pastor. Bishop Simpson exercises ecclesiastical oversight over pastors in the region and has a sizable staff of ministers interested in theological training. Rev. Brogdon addressed a packed house about “Christian leadership through theological education” and sent warm greetings from the Louisville Seminary family.

Director on the road in July

- July 12-14 Central District Baptist Association Annual Meeting in Louisville. Revs. Hill, Gray, and Brogdon will be in attendance.
- July 14-18 Annual Conference for Indiana-Ohio-Kentucky District of the CME Church in New Albany, IN. LPTS alumni in attendance.
- July 26 preaching at New Mt Zion Baptist Church. Rev. Kilen Gray (LPTS alum and Dean of Students) pastor.
- July 30-31 National Black Presbyterian Caucus 40th Annual Convention in Birmingham AL.

Dates for fall BCS Certificate Program weekend seminars

- September 18-19, 2009. Friday 6-8 pm and Saturday 10-4. Black Church Studies 1 Scott Williamson, professor.
- October 16-17, 2009. Friday 6-8 pm and Saturday 10-4. Black Church Studies 2 Debra Mumford, professor.
- Currently accepting applications for 2009 cohort.